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Observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control

Report of the Secretary-General

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Cuba

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For the ninth consecutive year and with a broad majority of support from Member States, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted, at its fifty-ninth session, a resolution entitled the "Observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control", an initiative of the Non-Aligned Movement, which enjoys the firm support of the Government of Cuba.

Concern about the direct relationship between disarmament and environmental protection is a growing priority for many States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals. That concern has to do not only with the potential for serious accidents related to the handling of radioactive waste, but also with the implementation and drafting of disarmament and arms control agreements, which should include concrete measures for protecting the environment.

It is widely acknowledged that while scientific and technological progress offers the potential to have a beneficial impact on the natural environment, it also makes it possible to use environmental modification techniques for military purposes. Military research and development activities are direct or potential sources of damage to the environment.

The adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques, ratified by Cuba on 10 April 1978, gave voice to the concerns of the international community in this regard.

Progress made in the field of biotechnology is accompanied by concerns about the potential risks and about the deliberate abuse of that discipline. Examples are the ecological risks resulting from the release into the environment of genetically modified organisms, genetic manipulation, human cloning and the development of biological and toxin weapons.

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) Weapons, to which Cuba has been a party since 21 April 1976, banned the production, storage and acquisition of such weapons.

However, Cuba deeply regrets that because of the position taken by the United States, negotiations on a protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention were interrupted after nearly 10 years of work by the Ad Hoc Group of Governmental Experts. The draft protocol included, inter alia, proposals for protecting the environment in the implementation of the Convention.

In contrast, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction provides a model of how to effect the complete prohibition of this type of weapon of mass destruction. In this connection, Cuba has continued to work towards the

implementation of the Convention by strengthening the relevant national institutions and procedures.

In the nuclear field, Cuba deeply regrets that the Conference on Disarmament has still not established an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. That committee must be established as a matter of priority, with the mandate to begin negotiations on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament whose goal is the definitive elimination of nuclear weapons within a fixed time frame and under strict international control. An international treaty on disarmament must necessarily include environmental protection measures.

Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons can all cause irreparable harm to the environment. Cuba therefore believes that the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction remains the only really effective solution for avoiding the consequences of their use or of accidental contamination.

It is likewise essential to promote and solidify international cooperation in the peaceful use of scientific and technological progress, not only with the participation of the States and intergovernmental institutions concerned but also with the contribution of non-governmental organizations. National laws and regulations that are impediments to such international cooperation must be eliminated. In this connection, Cuba rejects the application of unilateral measures that undermine the implementation of environmental protection norms and the promotion of sustainable development.

Cuba has a set of national instruments for the control and management of environmental policy, including Act. No. 81/97 on the Environment and its supplementary legislation and Decree-Law No. 190 on Biosafety. Article 27 of the Cuban Constitution has also been amended to incorporate the concept of sustainable development.

Cuba's economic and social development programme provides for environmental conservation and protection, including specific provisions whereby no military exercise, manoeuvre or other military activity may do harm to the natural environment.

The key principles of Cuba's environmental policy are the following:

- The right to a healthy environment is a fundamental right of all citizens;
- Citizens have a duty to protect the environment;
- Environmental management is comprehensive and cross-cutting. State agencies, other entities and institutions, society and citizens in general participate in it in a coordinated manner, according to their respective areas of competence and abilities.

For their part, the Cuban armed forces have adopted and are implementing an environmental strategy whose main goal is to ensure that, in progressively improving and developing the defence preparedness, capacity and readiness of the country, and especially of its armed forces, sound and sustainable use is made of natural resources, preserving the stability of the environment and supporting its restoration. The environmental work of the Cuban armed forces is based on a set of principles, which include:

- Developing, preserving and protecting the environment in peacetime, so as to contribute to the country's economic development;
- Applying an environmental approach to defence activities, eliminating or mitigating the potentially adverse impact of military activities;
- Using the results of scientific research and technological development carried out by the institutions and programmes of the Cuban armed forces to contribute, insofar as possible, to solving the main environmental problems caused by defence activities;
- Supporting the implementation of national environmental management laws and instruments within the armed forces.

In the international sphere, Cuba is currently a State party to 35 international instruments on or closely related to the environment.

Cuba reiterates the need to continue to adopt the necessary national, bilateral, regional and multilateral measures so as to contribute to the application of scientific and technological progress in the framework of international security, disarmament and other related spheres, without detriment to the environment or to its effective contribution to attaining sustainable development.